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ABSTRACT

The evolution of the Workplace Education Service that operates in South Australia is chronicled. Begun as a single program designed to integrate workplace literacy, English as a Second Language, and literacy education for both native and non-native English-speakers in an automobile plant, the project grew into a network of programs and services in ten colleges across the region. Establishment of the initial program and foundations for expansion are the focus of this report. These aspects of the program's development are highlighted: rationale and potential for support; writing a workplace education policy; program consultation and management; sources of funding; administrative and logistical considerations in formation of the first unit; creating the administrative structure; unit development and operation; teacher roles and responsibilities; program philosophy and values; and benefits of the comprehensive, as contrasted with fragmented, approach to literacy and workplace education. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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CREATING A COMPREHENSIVE WORKPLACE TESOL & LITERACY SERVICE

Paper Presented at the TESOL '92 Convention
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7 March 1992

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Workplace education in Australia has come a long way since its official beginnings in the early 1970's. Industry, unions and governments now recognise that if workplace TESOL and literacy programs are to be viable, if they are to survive in the training and development marketplace, they must be directly linked to job skills training and career paths, firmly set within the industrial relations context and capable of providing clear progression from the learning 'margins' to the 'mainstream'.

It is also now a central tenet of workplace education that the systems of organisational communication have to change if anything of lasting effect is to be achieved.

This shift in thinking - from 'English classes' to 'workplace-based education' - has led to the creation of Australia's first combined Adult Literacy, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Communication Studies workplace education program.

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Background

From a very small base of activity in the mid-1970's, workplace TESOL grew steadily. Through the mid-1980's, the professional growth in this sub-field of TESOL was roughly paralleled by the emergence among unions, employer groups and government agencies of a strong advocacy for worker education.

Still, it was a marginal area of teaching with serious limitations. By its very charter, EWP was not permitted or funded to enrol workers of English speaking backgrounds (ESB) or even many of the non-English speaking background (NESB) workers in the same workplace who had perhaps reached a survival stage of oracy and wished to develop literacy skills in English.

The Workplace Basic Education Project in Melbourne, introduced in 1984-85, was able to enroll both ESB and NESB workers in ALBE courses,but it was expressly not going to deliver TESOL services. This resulted in both EWP and WBEP operating simultaneously in some large companies, separately funded, separately coordinated and often duplicating efforts. The demand appeared to be growing but the delivery mechanisms were not in place.

A national review of the AMEP English in the Workplace Program in 1989 confirmed that both employers and unions, while praising the existing provision, were critical of this fragmented approach. They called for a unified service that had natural links with industry rather than being dependent on a few knowledgeable teachers operating from the 'ivory tower' of an academic institution with largely unrelated concerns.

In South Australia, EWP teachers had been unofficially accepting English speaking background workers in ESL Literacy courses since 1988 and in 1989 negotiated a company-funded Writing Development Program open to all employees at the GMH Automotive plant. However, the program was unique and unlikely to succeed elsewhere without diverting EWP effort. But in the same year, a small team of adult literacy teachers, based (as was the EWP) at Adelaide College of Technical & Further Education, received a grant of International Literacy Year funding to explore the establishment of a basic workplace education project in Adelaide.

In a city of one million, served by a network of other TAFE colleges, all with links to industry and many with ESOL and literacy units, it made sense to combine forces. Now, after nearly two years of official activity, the Workplace Education Service is a network involving ten colleges across the metro and country areas of South Australia. Today, I want to describe the process of creating the initial unit and of laying the foundations for strong, state-wide growth.

Rationale & Support

The support for worker literacy and language education programs had been in existence for many years through trade unions, key industry figures, academics, government departments and community based organisations.

The motivation to actually put courses into workplaces varied from industry to industry, state to state, year to year, driven up or down by market and political forces.

The complex array of economic and industrial reforms sweeping Australia from the mid-1980's drove the workplace education stakes higher in the very late 1980's. From 1987 onwards, every EWP and BWEP in Australia faced excess demand as more and more industries and enterprises finally realised the economic necessity of having a literate, numerate, participative workforce. The occurrence of International Literacy Year in 1990, with its injection of funding to the much-neglected literacy field, was in many ways the catalyst for the current boom in workplace literacy.

Writing the Workplace Education Policy

When the South Australian Department of Employment & TAFE invited senior business, union and government figures to form a steering committee to develop a state workplace education policy, the response was impressive. Representatives came from the S.A. Chamber of Commerce & Industry, the S.A.Employers Federation, the Engineering Employers Association, the United Trades & Labor Council, Trade Union Training Authority, the Commonwealth departments of Employment, Education and Training, Immigration and Industrial Relations as well as enterprise-based management and union representatives.

All through late 1989 and into 1990 the Workplace Literacy Project team and English in the Workplace Program staff worked with the steering committee to develop a policy and to plan a strategy for implementing the combined service approach. The main elements of that policy, adopted after eleven drafts had been through the various hoops and systems, are outlined here.

S.A. WORKPLACE EDUCATION SERVICE POLICY - 1990

RATIONALE

TAFE Response to Industry and Workforce Needs
Occupational Health Safety & Welfare, Social Justice Principles

CONSULTATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

State Tripartite Advisory Committee
Enterprise Tripartite Support Groups
Industry, Government & Academic Links

PRINCIPLES OF OPERATION

1. MANAGERIAL

State-wide planning & monitoring
Consistent program marketing & delivery
Maintenance of Employee/Employer Confidentiality
Tripartite Negotiations

2. EDUCATIONAL

Inclusive of all aspects of diversity
Linked to vocational skills development
Accreditation of programs
Voluntary participation (encouragement for disadvantaged)
Within work time (negotiable levels)

3. STAFFING

Relevant experience & expertise (educational & industrial)
Training for the industrial context
All staff in teaching & consultancy roles (by negotiation)
Professional links & interdisciplinary training
No use of external voluntary tutors

4. FINANCIAL

Range of funding sources (state, federal, employer, grants)
Common approach to cost recovery (assist employers,non-profit)
Revenue directed to WES development
Full financial accountability

At last, worker education had been taken out of the realm of the remedial gesture and set firmly in the context of industrial change, human rights and economic development. The scope of the intended service was also broader than previous visions had described, setting out a strategy for reaching across the whole state.

Program Consultation & Management

The WES Policy calls for a tripartite approach to planning, negotiation and delivery. At the state level the Workplace Education Advisory Committee has advisory, monitoring and advocacy roles. In addition to this committee, which meets three or four times a year, there is an extensive network of industry contacts to draw on.

Within the TAFE system, WES is represented on a state-wide program management group for ESL and Preparatory Education. An informal network of participating and interested colleges was created to coordinate efforts. By mid-1991, our lines of communication had been established.

In early 1992, the three Commonwealth departments involved (Immigration, Industrial Relations and Education,Employment & Training) agreed to form a state Workplace English Language and Literacy Program committee including trade union, employer and provider representatives. The membership is largely drawn from the advisory committee.

Funding

Where was the money going to come from? By agreement with the Immigration Department, the EWP unit and funding was transferred to the new Workplace Education Service, Adelaide College of TAFE. The state government put up equivalent funding from its Social Justice Initiatives (Award & Industry Restructuring) program, a portion of which was to go to the four other colleges designated to introduce units. The Preparatory Education Program Group of TAFE provided an additional grant to enable the other colleges to enter the field. This plus the cost recovery from client organisations gave the new entity an operating budget of around half a million dollars - a doubling of activity and a much greater 'reach' in terms of contacts and geographical access.

Forming the WES Unit

There were a few administrative and logistical obstacles to overcome in forming the first WES unit. The process was greatly assisted by the facts that the two elements of the new service were already located in the same college and were both federally funded, though from different departments. More importantly, both groups had a common commitment to creating the service in spite of doubts about the feasibility of meeting TESOL and adult literacy teachers' professional needs within the same structure.

With the official formation of the Workplace Education Service in July 1990, the two elements were located in the same premises and the real work began. Throughout the process of forming policy and bringing the elements of a team together, the EWP work had been carried on. Now, the unit had to strengthen the literacy program elements at existing sites and introduce the comprehensive model in new locations, not an easy job due to the prevailing perception of 'The Problem' as an immigrant worker phenomenon. Added to the pressure of building a team with clear goals and roles was the task of developing the capacity to help four - and more - other colleges to enter the field.

Through a series of workshops and lengthy consultations, the unit agreed on a mission statement and three broad objectives.

> WORKPLACE EDUCATION SERVICE MISSION STATEMENT
>
> The TAFE Workplace Education Service provides a comprehensive and integrated program of English language, literacy, numeracy and other communication skills training.
>
> The aim of all WES programs is to enable individuals across the workforce to communicate more effectively to reach personal, organisational and community goals.

The key elements of the mission statement are the comprehensive range of services, the integration with other workplace training and the state-wide availability of programs. The community goals are those relating to social justice policies.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

1. Provide consultancy, communication, English language and literacy education and training services to all levels of the Adelaide metropolitan workforce.

2. Provide teacher, materials and curriculum development support to the state-wide service in collaboration with other colleges and education providers.

3. Liaise with state and national industry, government, community and academic bodies to promote workplace education and to participate in policy development.

The expanded range of services offered illustrates the inclusiveness of the new program.

WORKPLACE EDUCATION SERVICE

RANGE OF SERVICES

1. TRAINING AND COMMUNICATION SURVEYS

English Language, Literacy & Communication Skills Surveys
Communication Training Needs Analyses

2. LANGUAGE, LITERACY & COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING

English as a Second or Other Language Courses
Literacy/Written Communication Courses
Numeracy/Mathematics Courses
Individual Learning Arrangements
Technical & Special Purposes English and Literacy Courses
Skills Training Support & Bridging Courses
Communication Skills Workshops & Courses

3. OTHER SERVICES

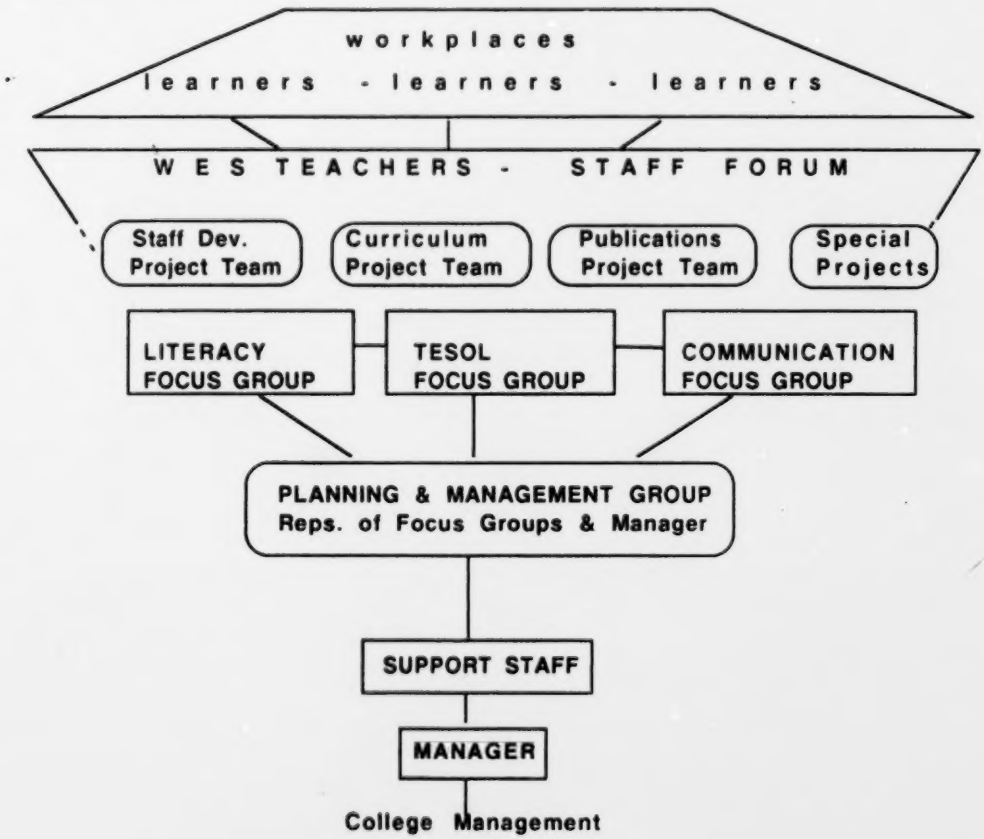
Counselling & Referral Services
Training Program Design Assistance
Management & Supervisory Communication Training
Publications Advisory & Editing Service

Creating a Unit Structure

For several months after its establishment, the WES unit continued to deliver services to industry while working on teacher training and curriculum development. Our group of about 12 teachers had elected to take a participative management approach. The initial unit structure was very simple, with everyone having a direct line to the unit manager, but with no structural recognition of specific needs within the unit.

There were serious differences of opinion regarding directions for the unit, divergent views of priorities and sometimes an uneasy sense that perhaps TESOL and Adult Literacy were poles apart. There were differing methodologies for the different client groups, different approaches to needs assessment and materials development in several areas. There was a common professional intent and commitment to the creation of the new unit but clearly there was a need for teachers from both disciplines to not only maintain professional links but to be able to direct their own development and, most importantly, to cross-link. The ideal of a multi-disciplinary unit was seen to depend on two factors; focussed teacher, materials and curriculum development and the multi-skilling of unit members.

At a two-day planning workshop early in 1991, a structure was agreed on which recognises these needs.



Within this structure it is possible to have team members spending time in different focus groups, to have teachers from all three main areas together in a project team,to participate in unit management and planning and to bring everyone together as a staff forum when needed. Most importantly, it goes a long way to ensuring continual development of the literacy service.

Unit Development and Operation

The Focus Groups and Project Teams are responsible for much of the development of the WES unit. For example, the Curriculum team began by establishing curriculum development objectives and a set of unit performance indicators based on the principles of effectiveness, efficiency and equity. They also began to investigate the course accreditation process and formally registered WES course codes within the TAFE system. Members of the team were also involved with national literacy projects.

The Publications team produced the WES brochures, newsletter, letterhead and so on.

After conducting a training needs analysis survey of workplace teachers, the Staff Development team organised and ran a 4-day in-service conference and several planning and team-building workshops. The team is also responsible for monthly sessions designed to expose teachers from the focus groups to different or new methodologies and materials.

The planning and management group is responsible for prioritizing activities and producing staffing and work plans. All of these activities involve the focus groups and project teams and WES teachers from other colleges through the WES Network.

With roles in delivery, development, support and liaison,the question facing the unit is; Who is going to do all of this?

Workplace Education Service Teacher Roles

It should be obvious by now that the WES model cannot work without people who can fill most or all of the roles of teacher, researcher, consultant, advisor, counsellor, negotiator and facilitator. When workplace teachers have been heavily or exclusively deployed in teaching roles, their effectiveness in the workplace is limited. They lack the personal contacts, the knowledge of the communicative and industrial contexts and an understanding of the pressures affecting learners, their co-workers, managers and so on. In many cases, they might as well be teaching the same group of people in the comfort -and isolation- of a local college.

The complexity of the WES work plan necessitates a staffing deployment formula that recognises the multiple roles and that quantifies and balances staff responsibilities. The staffing plan takes all of these issues into account.

Each WES lecturer is deployed in the following areas by negotiation:

WES STAFF DEPLOYMENT

CORE ROLES

1. **TEACHING HOURS** - 15 HOURS FULL-TIME MAXIMUM
2. **PREPARATION HOURS** - 75% OF TEACHING HOURS
3. **TEACHING PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT** - ON-SITE LIAISON, DESIGN, EVALUATION & FEEDBACK, WES & CLIENT PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION
4. **TRAVEL HOURS** - AVG. 15% OF DUTY HOURS
5. **WES MEETINGS** - FORUMS, FOCUS GROUPS

OTHER ROLES - Deployment in these roles requires reductions in core roles.

6. **TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS** - DATA GATHERING, ASSESSMENT & OBJECTIVE SETTING, REPORT AND PROPOSAL WRITING
7. **TEACHING PROGRAM SUPPORT** - PROGRAM COORDINATION, ADMIN, REPORT WRITING, TEACHER MENTORING
8. **RESEARCH PROJECTS** - INDUSTRY & ENTERPRISE SURVEYS & STUDIES
9. **DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS** - PROJECT TEAMS
10. **OTHER DUTIES** - MANAGEMENT, SECONDMENTS, CONFERENCES, PUBLIC CONTACT

Extensive staff development is called for when teachers are new to workplace education. The viability of the unit is also greatly dependent on staff continuity. Finding and keeping the right people can be a unit's most time-consuming and problematic concern. The wide range of working conditions, the complexity of the task, the high levels of accountability, the stresses that come with increased teacher autonomy - all can take their toll.

It is not possible to over-emphasize the importance of staffing in establishing and maintaining a workplace education program. If a program does not have good teachers, trained in industrial issues and approaches and well-supported professionally and financially, no amount of marketing or rhetoric can save the endeavour from collapse, or, even worse, mediocrity.

It is also worth repeating here the view of many Australian trade unionists and teachers that it is patently absurd to promote a service aimed at improving the working lives and career prospects of workers when the majority of the staff of that service have inferior employment conditions and career paths consisting of a rickety sequence of precarious contracts. It is educationally unsound to be unable to assure learners or their employing organisations of staff continuity when that continuity is the cornerstone of successful learning experiences and effective working relationships with organisations.

The Workplace Education Service Approach

The approach taken by any education and training provider is the manifestation of a philosophy and its underlying set of values. The central values of the Workplace Education Service are to certain extent set down in the policy; social justice, full collaboration and participation, integration with skills training, accreditation and articulation of programs, confidential and voluntary participation and the provision of a non-profit service to the industrial community.

Workplace teachers must also maintain a professional neutrality as they operate in a politically and socially volatile environment, faced with the complex task of improving communication across the organisation. To protect the confidentiality of learners, co-workers and employers and to balance the needs of all parties within the one program requires objectivity and skill.

To ensure that programs incorporate these values and principles, WES has developed a 5-stage approach. The first stage after the initial negotiations have been completed is a two- to three-hour Information and Planning Workshop for the widest range of stakeholder representatives possible to foster an understanding of the nature and objectives of the program. Then come the traditional stages of training needs analysis, program design, delivery and evaluation.

The approach does not differ significantly from those of other training organisations - which is part of its strength. By taking this very structured approach, we are able to identify the essential elements for success and make sure all the players touch all the bases.

Linking the principles and values of workplace education to the events in the approach is critical during the early stages of negotiation and needs analysis. For example, it is common, despite careful prior explanation of the nature of WES, to hear managers and unionists still revealing their firm belief that we are providing a remedial service for deficient individuals. At such a point it is imperative to re-state the conditions for successful programs and go back to basic premises before continuing activity.

The Benefits of the Inclusive Approach

The Workplace Education Service has now been operating for 20 months, having grown from one unit to seven, with others in formation, and from a metropolitan to a state-wide program. What are the benefits?

For our learners the benefits have been an increased variety of learning opportunities and learning pathways. Where we have been successful in introducing the comprehensive approach,

we have been able to help workers move onto a continuum of learning arrangements with clear links to vocational skills training and further job opportunities.

Non-English speaking background workers have proceeded from ESOL courses to join literacy courses with English-speaking workers.One of the results of such contact has been increased mutual understanding and much better relationships. Other learners come to WES programs from parallel training programs in statistical process control. Experiencing difficulty with the mathematics required, they enrol in existing Workplace Maths or Writing courses for help or request that such courses be mounted.

One of the most important -and perhaps least foreseen - results of bringing ESL and literacy services together has been to reduce the marginalisation of both groups. As long as English language learners were being taught separately and literacy learners were attending community based courses, both groups were very marginal. Now, bringing English and non-English speaking background workers together into programs with training and other job-related goals is having the effect of changing their status, of giving them a more equal voice in the workplace change process, of moving them in from the margins.

For organisations the benefits have been seen in the traditionally-measured areas of increased confidence, flexibility, safety awareness and participation. But by introducing a program that is open to <u>all</u> workers the companies have also seen a rise in participation and interest in training. As unions and employers are seen to be supporting such programs they are reaping the benefits of improved status among workers. A major benefit for employers has been that they can now choose from a range of services within the same organisation, delivered to a high standard by people with whom they they have developed strong working relationships.

Finally, for the TESOL and Adult Literacy teachers of WES, the benefits have been various and continue to emerge. Teachers from both disciplines have improved professional development opportunities, both in their chosen fields and in a second field. Project work has provided opportunities for development in non-teaching areas. Training in industrial issues has enhanced their understanding of adult learning needs, obstacles and motivations.

The unquestioned relevance of language and literacy training to workforce development has also greatly enhanced the status and job prospects of skilled workplace educators. Increasingly, they are being called on to advise key players in the industrial restructuring field, to join research efforts in the areas of skills analysis and competency based training and to communicate the message of lifelong education to workers and employers across entire industries. Inevitably, this means for many teachers a fundamental change of career direction, the manifestations of which have profound implications for teacher education.

The full effects of the change to a comprehensive approach to worker language and literacy education are still emerging. The early results have been very promising and with the broad and growing support from all quarters, the future of this model looks bright.

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